The Boundaries of Refutation

A *Salafī* clarification on criticism, warning, caution, and the ruling of *Tabdīʿ*

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Introduction

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على أشرف الأنبياء والمرسلين، سيدنا ونبينا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين. وبعد

All praise is for Allāh, Lord of the worlds, and may blessings and peace be upon the noblest of the Prophets and Messengers, our master and our Prophet Moḥammad, and upon his family and all his Companions.

To proceed:

This text is based on a lecture titled Commentary on *Some Narrations From the Salaf Regarding Creed and Methodology*, organized by Albaseerah on June 5, 2022, and delivered by Shaykh Abū ʿIyāḍ Amjad Rafīq. The lecture forms part of a broader series connected to the explanations of ʿAllāmah ʿUbayd b. ʿAbdillāh al-Jābirī, titled *Sharḥ Baʿḍ al-Āthār as-Salafīyah* [Explanation of Some Narrations of the *Salaf*].

This clarification has been paraphrased, edited, and prepared for public benefit due to the **recurring confusion among many of the youth**, and due to the **widespread misconceptions surrounding these delicate issues of the *Salafī Manhaj*** [methodology]. From time to time, the same pattern reappears: when a scholar, student of knowledge, or public figure beloved to a particular group is criticized, some people rush to condemn the one who issued the criticism, even when his criticism is **correct, evidence-based, and rooted in the principles of the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, and the understanding of *as-Salaf aṣ-Ṣāliḥ*** [the pious

predecessors]. They struggle to accept that someone they revere may have fallen into **error, injustice, false judgement, unsound methodology, or a mistaken position**.

Instead of **examining the substance of the issue**, they often hide behind general *Tazkiyāt* [commendations and scholarly endorsements], attack the credibility of the critic, or divert attention away from the actual evidences by focusing on the critic's tone, his alleged harshness, or the emotional discomfort caused by the refutation. Yet the genuine *Salafī* is not deceived by these diversions. **He examines the content.** If the criticism is **aligned with the truth, supported by evidence, and consistent with the principles of *Ahl as-Sunnah*** [the people who adhere to the Prophetic creed and way], he accepts it. If it is **false, unjust, exaggerated, or unsupported**, he rejects it. The criterion is not personality, reputation, popularity, emotional attachment, institutional loyalty, or personal affection. **The criterion is truth.**

There is **no blind fanaticism [*Taʿaṣṣub*] to anyone**. There is **no exaggeration [*Ghuluww*] for any scholar, caller, student, group, or institution**. There is **no emotional attachment that overrides evidence**. We love the scholars of the *Sunnah*, honor them, and know their virtue, but **we do not raise anyone above correction, evidence, or accountability**. Our allegiance is to the truth, and our binding reference is **the *Qurʾān* and the *Sunnah* upon the understanding of *as-Salaf aṣ-Ṣāliḥ***, at the head of whom is the Messenger of Allāh, our noble Prophet Moḥammad ﷺ.

Therefore, this publication is intended to clarify the **necessary distinctions between *Naqd* [critical assessment], *Radd* [refutation],**

Taḥdhīr* [warning], *Tabdīʿ* [declaring someone to be an innovator], and related rulings within the *Salafī Manhaj [methodology]. These categories are often confused, especially when criticism is directed toward a **scholar, student of knowledge, caller, or beloved figure**.

Rather, **each ruling has its own conditions, scope, evidences, and consequences**. The purpose of this clarification is therefore to **restore precision**, protect people from **emotional reactions and fanaticism [*Taʿaṣṣub*]**, and return these matters to their proper foundations: **evidence, justice, and adherence to the *Qurʾān* and *Sunnah* upon the understanding of *as-Salaf aṣ-Ṣāliḥ*** [the pious predecessors].

The *Shaykh* [i.e. ʿUbayd al-Jābirī] says that today there are people who ascribe themselves to knowledge, yet they become angry when someone whom they love is refuted for a mistake he has made. They behave as though **every refutation of such a person amounts to *Tabdīʿ*** [declaring someone to be an innovator]. This is not correct. Merely criticizing or refuting someone does not automatically mean that the person has been declared a *Mubtadiʿ* [one judged to be an innovator in religion].

A knowledge-based refutation, when it is built upon the *Qurʾān* [the revealed Book of Allāh], the *Sunnah* [the Prophetic way], the statements of the leading scholars, and the way of the *Salaf* [the righteous predecessors], is not blameworthy. Rather, it is **from the foundations of *Ahl as-Sunnah*** [the people who adhere to the Prophetic creed and way]. The people of the *Sunnah* refute every *Mukhālif* [one who opposes the

truth], even if he is from among themselves, and they do so with evidence.

The confusion arises when people fail to distinguish between different categories: *Radd* [refutation], *Naqd* [critical assessment], *Taḥdhīr* [warning], and *Tabdīʿ*. **These are not identical categories, and one does not automatically necessitate the other.**

A person may be from *Ahl as-Sunnah*, upon the way of the *Salaf*, and even a person of knowledge, yet he may make an error in a particular *Masʾalah* [specific issue] or *Qaḍīyah* [case or matter]. He may err in knowledge, in *Uslūb* [method, style, or manner of approach], in conduct, in a particular position, or in a specific issue. **If he is criticized or corrected for that, this does not mean that he has automatically become a *Mubtadiʿ*.**

An example of this is what occurred with Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn, may Allāh have mercy upon him. In one of his writings, he spoke concerning the *Maʿīyah* [Allāh's being with His creation in a manner befitting His Majesty], and used an expression that was criticized. Shaykh Ḥammūd at-Tuwayjirī, may Allāh have mercy upon him, wrote a book refuting that statement. Shaykh Ibn Bāz, may Allāh have mercy upon him, read the book and supported it. Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn himself also accepted and aided that refutation, even though it addressed his own error. **This demonstrates that correcting a mistake does not necessitate *Tabdīʿ*.**

Everyone may err. The person of the *Sunnah*, however, returns from his mistake when it is clarified to him, because **his objective is the *Sunnah*.** He may have slipped, misunderstood, spoken imprecisely, or erred in expression, yet he returns when the truth becomes clear.

Likewise, a person may be warned against in a specific matter without this necessitating *Tabdīʿ*. Among the scholars of *Ḥadīth* [Prophetic narration], some were known for excessive leniency in judging narrators, while others were known for excessive severity. Their individual statements were therefore not always accepted in isolation, due to their known tendency toward leniency or harshness. This did not mean that such scholars were *Mubtadiʿūn* [innovators] or people of misguidance. Rather, it meant that **caution was required in a particular area**.

Similarly, a person of the *Sunnah* may utter a statement of *Bidʿah* [religious innovation] or fall into an action of *Bidʿah*. One may say, "This statement is *Bidʿah*," or "This action is *Bidʿah*," without necessarily declaring the individual himself to be a *Mubtadiʿ*. The scholars distinguished between saying that a person has committed an innovation, or that he is a *Ṣāḥib Bidʿah* [one associated with or involved in an innovation] in a restricted sense, and saying absolutely that he is a *Mubtadiʿ*, meaning one who innovates into the religion, persists upon innovation after clarification, or calls others to it.

Thus, not every person who is criticized or refuted has thereby been declared a *Mubtadiʿ*. **There is a spectrum between mere correction and formal *Tabdīʿ*.** The false understanding is to assume: "He has been refuted; therefore, he is a *Mubtadiʿ*." This is not the way of the *Salaf*.

ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar as-Sarakhsī, the scholar of *al-Khazar*, said: "*I ate one meal with a person of Bidʿah, and this reached ʿAbdullāh b. al-Mubārak. He said: 'I will not speak to him for thirty days.'*"

Does this mean that ʿAbdullāh b. al-Mubārak declared ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar as-Sarakhsī to be a *Mubtadiʿ*? No. Rather, he saw from him an action unbefitting for a person of the *Sunnah*. In order to show disapproval, he boycotted him for a limited period. The reason is that a person of knowledge and prominence, if seen sitting or eating with a person of *Bidʿah*, **may mislead common Muslims into thinking that sitting with such people is acceptable**. Such conduct may harm the religion by weakening the barrier between the *Sunnah* and *Bidʿah*.

This is not *Tabdīʿ*. **It is a disciplinary stance taken for wisdom and benefit.**

Another report is mentioned by Ibn Waḍḍāḥ al-Qurṭubī in *al-Bidaʿ wa-n-Nahy ʿAnhā* [*Innovations and the Prohibition of Them*]. A man said: "*I was walking with ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd, and Ibn ʿAwn saw me, so he turned away from me for two months.*" ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd was among the heads of the *Muʿtazilah* [a rationalist theological sect] in the early second century. At that time, the full doctrinal system of the later *Muʿtazilah* had not yet been developed in the way later figures such as al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār would articulate it. Nevertheless, statements of misguidance had already appeared from them concerning *al-Qadar* [Divine Decree], along with attacks upon the *Muḥaddithīn* [specialists in Prophetic narration]. Ibn ʿAwn therefore showed disapproval toward one who walked with such a person.

Again, this was not necessarily a declaration that the person himself had become a deviant innovator. Rather, it was **discipline for conduct that could bring deception upon the common Muslim and harm upon the religion**.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim also narrates from ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Uwaysī that when Ismāʿīl b. Abī Uways went out to Ḥusayn b. ʿAbdullāh b. Ḍumayrah, and this reached Imām Mālik, Mālik boycotted him for forty days. Mālik was not pleased with his association with that individual. This too shows the way of the scholars: **a person may be from *Ahl as-Sunnah*, yet be disciplined or warned due to an action, position, or association that is not correct**.

Likewise, Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Hārūn al-Mawṣilī said that he asked Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal concerning al-Karābīsī and the statement, "*My recitation of the Qurʾān is created*." Imām Aḥmad replied: "*Beware of this al-Karābīsī. Do not speak to him, and do not speak to whoever speaks to him*." When asked whether this statement and its branches returned to the saying of Jahm, Imām Aḥmad said: "*Yes, all of it is from the saying of Jahm b. Ṣafwān*."

These reports show that **lenience toward the people of deviation and misguidance is dangerous**. This is what afflicted previous religious communities: gradual lenience, compromise, and the erosion of religious boundaries. Their religion became altered and distorted. This will not happen to Islām in the same way, by the permission of Allāh, because of the preserved methodology of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* [the people of Prophetic narration], *Ahl al-Athar* [the people of transmitted reports], and those who follow the way of the *Salaf*. These principles are part of the preservation of **sound creed, sound methodology, and correct religious foundations**.

Once this is understood, it becomes clear that a person may ascribe himself to the *Sunnah*, may possess knowledge, and may be known for

good, yet he may fall into matters that require caution. He may fail to take the correct position regarding certain individuals. He may be affected by *Taʿaṣṣub* [partisanship or blind attachment], *Hawá* [vain desire], personal attachment, companionship, affiliation, or some other worldly consideration.

One example is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Maʾribī. He had previous *Ikhwānī* and *Takfīrī* roots [i.e. affiliated with or influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and inclined toward declaring Muslims to be unbelievers without right], visited Yemen, sat for a time with scholars, and became well known. After the death of major scholars such as Shaykh al-Albānī, Shaykh Ibn Bāz, Shaykh al-ʿUthaymīn, and Shaykh Muqbil, he openly promoted principles resembling the principles of *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* [the Muslim Brotherhood], though reformulated in language directed at *Ahl as-Sunnah*. The scholars refuted him, exposed his false principles, and clarified his errors.

Once the *Ḥujjah* [established proof] is established, **a person has no excuse to continue defending an individual upon falsehood**. The obligation is to follow the truth. One does not follow *Hawá*, *ʿAdāwah* [enmity], *Ṭarīqah* [path, order, or factional way], *Riyāsah* [leadership-seeking or desire for status], *Madhhab* [legal school or adopted doctrinal position], companionship, or personal association. **One follows the truth.**

Some individuals remained attached to al-Maʾribī because of friendship or association, claiming that they were still advising him even after his affair had become clear. Among those mentioned are al-Ḥalabī, Usāmah al-Qūṣī, and Sālim al-Hilālī. Part of their deviation was connected to their

refusal to let go of al-Maʾribī, and eventually some of them began speaking with the same or similar principles.

The point is that there may be situations in which a person known for knowledge is cautioned against. It may be said: **do not attend his gatherings, do not attend his lectures, and do not go to his conferences**, because certain actions or positions have appeared from him that warrant caution.

The case of **Moḥammad b. Hādī** is presented as a more recent example. He fell into serious misconduct, including making an accusation in a mosque in *Madīnah* and attacking students of knowledge with harsh labels without evidence. The matter reached court, he was convicted regarding what he had done, and scholars, including Shaykh Rabīᶜ, refuted him and exposed his exaggeration, injustice, and lack of evidence. His affair also caused splits in Algeria, Morocco, across Europe, in the United Kingdom, and elsewhere.

Once such matters become clear with evidence, **one must follow the truth and cannot continue defending him or making excuses for him**. If a person does so, it indicates that he no longer gives the truth its proper weight, and he himself becomes an object of caution.

This is why, when scholars warn against attending the gatherings of **Shaykh Sulaymān ar-Ruḥaylī**, it is because he defended Moḥammad b. Hādī upon *Bāṭil* [falsehood] and did not follow the evidences in that matter. This does not mean that *Tabdīᶜ* has been made of Shaykh Sulaymān ar-Ruḥaylī. No one is saying that, and to claim that this is the intent would be a lie or a misunderstanding. Rather, the point is that a

person may take a wrong position, defend falsehood, excuse what is plainly incorrect, or fail to value the truth properly. **In such a case, caution is required.**

The same applies regarding **Ibrāhīm ar-Ruḥaylī**, who was refuted by the scholars for false principles he introduced. However, Shaykh Sulaymān ar-Ruḥaylī withholds taking any stance against his tribal member. If a person repeatedly fails to take the correct position in issues affecting the *Salafī* methodology and the unity of *Ahl as-Sunnah*, then **this becomes an area of caution**.

The reports from Imām Mālik, Ibn al-Mubārak, Ibn ʿAwn, and others show that the *Salaf* would take firm positions against blameworthy conduct, wrong association, and false positions. Such firmness did not always amount to *Tabdīʿ*. Rather, it could be a form of **correction, discipline, warning, or precaution**.

Therefore, it should be understood clearly: **a criticism, a refutation, or even a warning against an individual does not automatically mean that *Tabdīʿ* has been made upon him.**

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ corrected Muʿādh when he prolonged the prayer and caused hardship for the people. He said: "*Are you a Fattān [one who causes trial or hardship], O Muʿādh?*" This was a severe correction for a blameworthy action, **not a declaration that Muʿādh had become a deviant.**

Likewise, when one of the sons of ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar said that he would prevent women from going to the mosque, despite the statement of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar became extremely angry with

him and refused to speak to him thereafter. This was due to **opposition to a clear Prophetic instruction**.

Thus, when opposition appears from a person, a suitable stance may be warranted. This does not necessarily mean that he has been written off as a misguided deviant or declared a *Mubtadiʿ*. It may simply be a matter of caution.

And **in caution there is safety**.